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SNAFUs plague US and Soviet armies

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WHAT IF THEY DECLARED WAR and neither the United States troops nor the Soviets could find it?

The possibility of Soviet and American tank crews wandering around Europe looking for the front was raised in some new Defense Department and CIA reports.

The reports showed that SNAFU (situation normal all fouled up) is still a part of military life on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Defense Secretary Harold Brown, in his annual report to Congress, conceded that a Defense Department exercise called Nifty Nugget revealed "severe shortcomings" in the mobilization of US forces for a potential war in Europe.

And CIA Director Stansfield Turner said that the Soviets are "better than we are" in jamming communications and "ahead of us in command and control."

TURNER WAS COMMENTING on a newspaper article which charged that our military communications are so poor and so easy to intercept that the Soviets would have a better idea of the location of US tanks in Europe than US commanders would.

The Soviets have problems of a different sort. They can't read maps, according to Lt. Gen. Harold R. Aaron, deputy director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

A censored version of Aaron's testimony before a congressional subcommittee headed by Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) was released last week.

The general had just returned from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe last summer when he presented the testimony.

"I would like to tell you a funny thing that happened in (security deletion)," Aaron said in the transcript Proxmire made public.

THE DELETED WORD was the name of an Eastern European country where the Soviets were conducting a military exercise. Road signs were printed in Anglo-Saxon letters, rather than the Russian alphabet, Aaron said.

A United States attache was riding through the area in a Jeep, dressed in clothing that looked like a military uniform. "Suddenly, a Soviet lieutenant came up. Our attache thought he was going to throw him out of the maneuver area," Aaron said.

The Soviet officer, however, waved a map and said that he was trying to get to a particular town and couldn't find it.

The US official, who spoke Russian, was able to read the

road signs and showed the Soviet lieutenant how to find his destination.

While they were talking, a lost Soviet colonel arrived and also sought directions. If there were a war, Aaron said, "they may be going across the border and may end up on another route back to Moscow."

WITH SOVIET TANKS MAKING a mad dash for Moscow and US commanders looking for their troops in West Germany, US ammunition and weapons might well be back in South Dakota, judging from Brown's description of Nifty Nugget.

Brown said that the 1980 Defense Department budget was rewritten to correct some of the problems discovered in the exercise and that he has ordered a crash program involving top officials in the Defense Department to correct other deficiencies.

Aaron said that the Soviets were tremendously impressed with the technological achievements of the United States.

"I think one of the most intriguing items in the Soviet Union right now is the little pocket calculator," he told Proxmire's subcommittee.

"That we use in the military?" Sen. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) asked.

"No, that we go out and buy in the drugstore. It's the Mickey Mouse watch of 1978," Aaron replied.

"That is very key, their appraisal of us," Javits commented.